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WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Regional Meeting for Africa
Tunis, 2-6 November 1992
Agenda item 6 (c)

CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES RELATING TO THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

(c) ROLE OF COMPETENT NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

Report of Journalists' Workshop

Within the framework of the African Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Conference on Human Rights, the Tunisian Journalists' Association and the Union of African Journalists, in collaboration with the International Federation of Journalists, the African Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, organized a Workshop on "The Journalist and Human Rights in Africa" at Tunis from 31 October to 1 November 1992.

The programme for the workshop comprised four main topics: (i) The situation of the press and problems facing journalists in the exercise of their profession; (ii) Development and human rights; (iii) The major problems of Africans; (iv) The role of the African journalist in the implementation of the international human rights programme and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

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The opening meeting of the Workshop was attended by: Mr. Fathi Houidi, Secretary of State for Information in the Tunisian Government; Mr. John Pace, representing the United Nations; Mr. Gérard Gatinot, Secretary-General of the International Organization of Journalists; Mr. Lee Woodyear, the official responsible for human rights at the International Federation of Journalists; Mr. Ibrahim Badawi, Chairman of the African Commission on Human Rights; Mr. Fouad Bédiwi, representing the Union of African Journalists and Mr. Mohamed ben Salah, President of the Tunisian Journalists' Association. The work was also monitored by the representatives of a number of journalists' organizations in the African countries, as well as Tunisian journalists and international press correspondents.

A number of Tunisian and African experts presented papers at the Workshop.

During the consideration of the first topic, entitled "The situation of the press and problems facing journalists in the exercise of their profession", the participants pointed out that the press in Africa was suffering from numerous obstacles, particularly the lack of freedom of expression and impartial objective information, as was the case in most third-world countries. They reached the following conclusions:

1. The right of citizens to impartial information must be respected. To that end, journalists must enjoy appropriate working conditions and freedom to exercise their profession.

2. Governments should be called upon to lift the restrictions hampering the information media and to refrain from monopolizing the media or placing it under pressure.

3. The international monopoly of the information media must be terminated, since it is incompatible with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

4. African press agencies and national radio and television stations should be permitted to carry out their journalistic work independently as public bodies and should receive support to enable them to cover current events in the continent instead of relying totally on foreign agencies.

5. The task of journalists should be facilitated by granting them access to sources of information, allowing them to carry out their work in a professional manner without interference or pressure and ensuring their freedom and objectivity by affording them the requisite protection so that they can fulfil their mission of providing information in a manner consistent with the expectations of African citizens and their journalistic duty. In this regard, the participants declared their solidarity with the detained and persecuted journalists and called for their release and the restitution of all their rights.

6. The right of journalists to establish their own trade-union organizations at the national level should be guaranteed and the national and international parties concerned should be urged to facilitate their task and encourage the establishment of regional federations of journalists with a view to protecting

them and their profession and safeguarding the right to impartial information and freedom of expression, communication and association.

7. There is a need to safeguard the rights of women journalists, ensure their effective equality with their male colleagues and provide them with opportunities for vocational training and promotion.

The participants then considered the second topic, entitled "Human rights and development", and emphasized the following:

1. Development is a human right which can under no circumstances be dissociated from other human rights. Consequently, human rights and development must be promoted in an equal and simultaneous manner.

2. Human rights must be viewed in their broad context covering the rights of individuals as well as groups. On this basis, the human rights of individuals must be guaranteed within their communities and the rights of communities must also be guaranteed at the international level.

3. The access of all peoples to technology, as a basic factor for the enjoyment of human rights, must be guaranteed.

4. The aim of development is not solely economic prosperity; it is also human advancement in all fields. Accordingly, there is an essential need to recognize the right of individuals to development and well-being within their societies, as well as the right of every society to development and prosperity within the international community.

5. Since man is the primary factor in the creation of wealth, there is a need to promulgate national legislation and adopt resolutions at the international level in order to protect human resources and safeguard their rights at the national and international levels.

6. The system of visas should not be allowed to obstruct the right of individuals to freedom of movement, as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

After considering the third topic, concerning the major problems facing Africans, such as famine, disease, illiteracy and refugees, the participants expressed the following views:

1. Governments, international organizations and the Organization of African Unity must give due attention to these problems and formulate clearly defined strategies to solve them. Special concern should be shown for AIDS which, like other serious diseases, requires scientific research and collective endeavours to deal with its medical, social and psychological effects.

2. The specialized agencies and other organizations within the United Nations system (such as WHO, FAO, UNESCO and UNHCR), as well as OAU, should formulate an effective information strategy for these problems and should permit the information media and journalists to participate in the formulation and implementation of that strategy.

Finally, the participants considered the fourth topic, concerning the role of journalists in the implementation of the international human rights programme and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. They emphasized the following:

1. The universal concepts of human rights, as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should be adopted.

2. The Organization of African Unity and the United Nations system should support the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights by providing it with the means to formulate and implement a large-scale and integrated information plan which would enable the information media and journalists to stimulate public awareness of the principles of human rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

3. Journalists and the information media should be called upon to monitor the activities of States in the field of human rights, with a view to ensuring that those rights are respected by regimes in accordance with the commitments that they made when ratifying the International Covenants and the African Charter.

4. African Human Rights Day should be celebrated on 21 October every year as an opportunity to promote the principles of human rights and assess the extent to which they are being respected.

5. There is a need to guarantee freedom of information and expression, to enable journalists to fulfil their duty of promoting human rights and to protect them during their fulfilment of that important mission.

6. An African Journalists' and Freedom of Information Day should be celebrated throughout the African continent.

7. There should be collaboration between international organizations of journalists and those concerned with the protection of human rights with a view to ensuring the proper implementation of the international human rights programme and the application of the principles contained in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The participants thanked the university professors and experts who had kindly presented excellent research papers in preparation for the discussion of the various topics. They also thanked all the persons who had contributed to the organization and success of the Workshop.